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INTERVIEW WITH MARY LONSETH

BY

GINA CARDI

ABSTRACT (EDITOR'S COMMENTS)

Mary Lonseth is currently the sales and marketing director with Associated Motor Inns in Toledo, Ohio. She is an individual recognized as one who has a special ability to develop new markets especially in the realm of hotel, dinner theater, and concerts. Her unique ability to sell in difficult markets has brought her into prominence.

INTERVIEW WITH MARY LONSETH

Question I: What is one of the most important characteristics in sales and marketing in difficult areas?

Answer: The ability to be able to read people and know what they want. The professional must be people oriented and have an ability to sense interest and personalities in planning and packaging trips as well as the ability to provide immediate adaptation; on the spot change of programs to meet the needs of the individuals. Another important aspect is knowing the area and how the people will relate to this area.

Question II: What are some of the important aspects in terms of location and how important is that in the development of a sales program?

Answer: An important element is knowing the area well enough to be able to choose attractions within the community that are unique (different) and that will meet the needs of incoming groups. The key is packaging these uniquenesses and developing them into a program that will keep the participant satisfied. The basic issue in satisfaction is providing them a quality product so that the value for their dollars are provided for the least expense. Another dimension of location is that it is different from home and provides activity that cannot necessarily be experienced in their community. Even though the motive is profit, quality services in terms of convenience are the primary factors the client is looking for from the experience.

Question III: What are some of the important elements in the operationalizing of packaged programs?

Answer: Being successful consists of details and the ability to follow up on these details, making sure that all aspects of the operation run smoothly. The program or package as well as the professionals putting it

together and those executing it should exude an air of confidence. One problem in working with individuals, is that most participants are not really sure what they want from an experience. Therefore the programmer or the individual developing the package must make many assumptions and actually know the audience better than they know themselves. This does not suggest that a package must be over-programmed but alternatives and recommendations must be accessible. Once they have had an experience it is important to find out what the positive and negative points were, so that new packages evolve to fill future needs. Another problem involves the dissemination of information concerning package offerings, especially when the individual who has direct contact with participants does not post information and/or does not know how to determine what they want or need. This is especially true when dealing with employee services programs. Many times special sales programs must be designed to interface with these individuals showing them how to sell special materials to their employees. Another important dimension to attracting individuals who interface with these clients is discount sales promotions and personal contact.

Question IV: How important is the quality of the product in a market that is difficult to sell?

Answer: If you do not have a quality product or some type of uniqueness the product is almost impossible to sell. Some products, such as concerts with name stars, will sell themselves. However, with other products you must go out and market uniquenesses to audiences; make them aware of why they need a particular product or service. When a difficult market has been persuaded to try a product, and the product is of high quality, it will continue to sell itself. Consumers will quickly become aware of a "good thing" and will continue to request, as well recommend the product or service they have experienced.

Question V: How does an individual develop a competency to work in difficult markets?

Answer: The best way is to learn-by-doing and on the job experience. The individual must be astute in terms of observation skills, in order to be able to discriminate various approaches that will work best in difficult markets. The basic personality characteristics that lead to success in this area, are (1) an individual who is very people-oriented, honest, and patient (2) someone who has motivation and is a self-starter and (3) one who is excited by the challenge of new markets and finding different ways to approach old topics.
